

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I enroll in CREP?

CREP offers a way for agricultural landowners to generate revenue from marginal lands, while helping to protect wildlife habitat and water quality. Participants receive a significant up-front payment, as well as additional payments.

Will I still own my land?

Yes, you will own your property, and you can continue to use the land for recreation.

Will I have to allow public access?

No, public access is not required as part of the CREP program.

Do I have to put all of my land that is eligible for buffers into CREP?

No, you can put as much or as little of your eligible land into CREP as you like.

How will it affect my property taxes?

Land enrolled in CREP will be taxed under the same use-value assessment as it was prior to being enrolled. For example, if your land was assessed as agricultural-use, it will continue to be assessed in that category.

Do I have to plant trees or grass on my buffer?

You have to plant one or the other, depending on the site. Trees and grass are an important component of the buffer. They trap sediment, remove pollutants, stabilize soil, and provide critical wildlife habitat. You have the option of doing the planting yourself, or hiring a contractor to do the work. These expenses are reimbursable, to a limit.

Can I graze my cattle within the buffer?

No, grazing is not allowed within the boundaries of any buffers.

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Do I need to install and maintain a fence to keep out cattle?

Yes, if your cattle would normally go into the buffered area. Not all buffers need fencing, but cattle access is not allowed. CREP offers cost-sharing for new watering facilities and fencing. In addition, your annual payments will be slightly increased to cover maintenance costs. Fencing must be maintained such that it prohibits grazing and restricts cattle access.

Will I have to mow or spray within the buffer?

Yes, but most of this is done during the first year when cost-sharing is available. Herbicide treatment and/or limited mowing may be needed in forested buffers until trees are established. Annual payments include a small amount to assist with these expenses.

What can I do on my land enrolled in CREP?

You can use enrolled acres for recreation such as hunting, walking, and watching wildlife. They can also lease the land for hunting, control access, or sell the land. In general, landowners may use the land in any way that does not negatively impact the area.

Can I have trails, such as walking or ATV trails, within the buffer?

Land Conservation Department staff will evaluate specific requests. In general, hiking trails are allowed, but motorized trails are not.

Can I harvest trees that were planted as part of CREP?

Tree harvest is allowed only as part of the conservation plan for the area that has been prepared or approved by the local DNR or County forester, the County Conservationist, or the NRCS District Conservationist, and the FSA County Executive Director.

Do I need to replant or reseed if the plants fail?

Yes. If the conservation practice fails due to reasons beyond the control of the landowner (drought, flood, etc.), re-establishment costs will be cost-shared 50%. If the practice fails due to a lack of maintenance, the landowner is required to re-establish vegetation at their expense or repay CREP payments.

What is a permanent conservation easement?

A conservation easement is similar to more common easements, such as utility easements. It involves specific limitations for the affected part of the property. A conservation easement preserves natural resources like water quality or wildlife habitat. It typically does so by purchasing certain rights from the landowner, such as the right to build structures. An easement is recorded on the Deed and remains even as ownership changes.

How do the payments differ between a 15-year agreement and permanent easement?

The difference between a 15-year agreement and permanent easement is the up-front payment (signing incentive). This is made up of two parts: one from the federal government and one from the state. The federal portion is \$100 per acre and remains the same for both options. However, the state portion is significantly higher for a permanent easement. With a 15-year agreement, the state pays 2.5 times the annual rental rate (\$20 for pasture, resulting in a signing incentive of \$50/acre). For a permanent easement, the state pays 24 times the annual rental rate (\$20 for pasture, resulting in a signing incentive of \$480/acre).